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Yellow Nutsedge Control

Clark Throssell, Turfgrass Specialist

Yellow nutsedge is a troublesome, difficult to control weed often found in turf areas. Also known as nutgrass or swampgrass, yellow nutsedge is not a broadleaf weed or a grassy weed, but a sedge, and a thorough understanding of yellow nutsedge is required before it can be controlled.

Life Cycle and Identification

Yellow nutsedge is a perennial plant that reproduces primarily by small underground tubers called nutlets. Yellow nutsedge can also spread by rhizomes (below ground stems). Farmers have difficulty controlling this weed, and as farm land is converted to home sites, the yellow nutsedge plants, as well as nutlets, are often found in the soil of lawns.

Yellow nutsedge is most easily identified by the triangular shape of the stem (Figure 1). The leaves are light green to yellowish in color and are very slick or waxy to the touch. Yellow nutsedge grows most actively during the hot months of summer. Often the leaves of yellow nutsedge will grow 2 to 4 inches above the turf canopy. During spring and fall, when temperatures are cooler and growth is slower, yellow nutsedge is not as easily noticed.

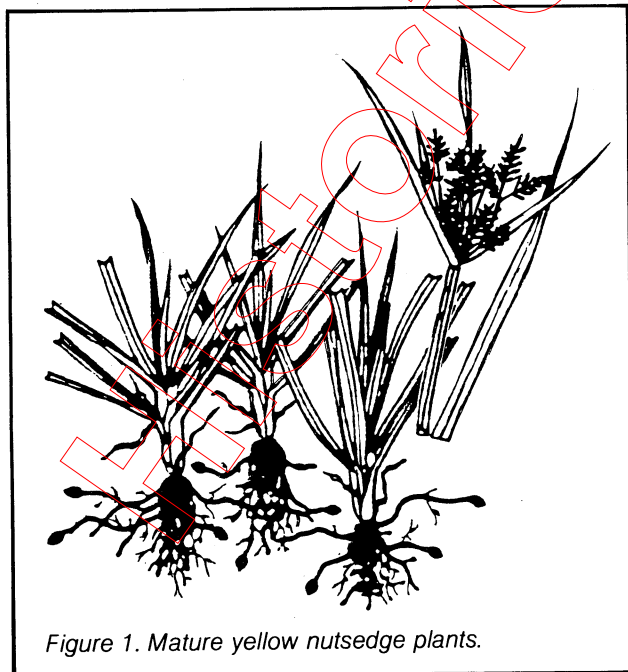


Figure 1. Mature yellow nutsedge plants.

Control Methods

A healthy, dense, vigorous stand of turf that can compete with yellow nutsedge and other weeds is the best control method. Encourage a dense stand of turf by following proper turf maintenance practices. If only a few yellow nutsedge plants are present, hand pulling may be successful in eliminating the problem. Several weeks after pulling the yellow nutsedge, check the area to see if regrowth from the nutlets has occurred.

Herbicides may be required when large patches of nutsedge are present in the turf area. For homeowners, a herbicide containing methanearsonate is recommended for controlling yellow nutsedge. Consider the following steps in order to be successful in reducing the nutsedge contamination.

1. Be sure to read and follow all directions on the herbicide label.
2. One day before making the herbicide application, irrigate the turf area to moisten the soil profile to a depth of 6 inches.
3. Treat the area with the proper rate of herbicide based on the recommendations found on the label. Do not apply the herbicide if the air temperature is above 85° F.
4. Two days after the herbicide application, irrigate the treated area with enough water to moisten the soil profile to a 6-inch depth.
5. Seven days after the first application, repeat steps 2 through 4. A third and possibly a fourth application may be necessary for complete control.

Professional turf managers can use a herbicide called Basagran (bentazon). This herbicide is not available to homeowners. In most cases Basagran will selectively eliminate yellow nutsedge from a turf area without damaging the desirable turf species. A professional turf specialist can be hired to apply Basagran. It will take repeat applications and patience to eliminate yellow nutsedge from a turf area.

Late spring/early summer is the ideal time to control yellow nutsedge. At this time yellow nutsedge is young, actively growing, and most susceptible to herbicidal control. As the summer progresses, the nutsedge becomes more mature and

begins to form seedheads. At this time it is very difficult to control. In late summer/early fall it is nearly impossible to control nutsedge. At this time it is best to wait until spring before attempting to control nutsedge.

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